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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3512
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4043
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000878

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SLEIMAN PRAISES ARMY, CRITICIZES ISRAEL,
AND CALLS FOR POLITICAL REFORM

REF: BEIRUT 874

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In his speech commemorating the 64th Army Day, President Michel Sleiman praised the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) while criticizing the delay in forming a cabinet. He called for constitutional reform if it would close "loopholes" and facilitate better institutions. Sleiman stated early that Lebanon had suffered since the "creation of Israel." He also praised the work of the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and urged a full implementation of UNSCR 1701 with Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory and cessation of overflights. Media reports were generally positive regarding Sleiman's cajoling the political establishment to move forward on "large scale process" of reform. His message was in harmony with his desire to expand the role of the President as a second consensual element of the Lebanese state, in addition to the LAF. End summary.

THE ARMY'S DAY BUT A
FOCUS ON POLITICS

12. (U) President Michel Sleiman praised the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) while criticizing the delay in forming a cabinet during a ceremony on August 1 commemorating the 64th Army Day at the military academy in Fidayieh. Sleiman criticized footdragging in the formation of the government, urged politicians to serve the nation instead of themselves, and decried the influence of sectarianism. Consistent with his May speech celebrating his one-year anniversary in power, Sleiman called for strong economic programs and to end electricity and water shortages. His message underscored the need for electoral reform and full implementation of the 1989 Taif Accord.

13. (U) Sleiman professed that if problems of poor governance were due to constitutional deficiencies then the constitution should be amended to close "loopholes" that obstruct the rules of democracy and the smooth running of government

institutions. Sleiman's more politically oriented speech was in stark contrast to his 2008 Army Day speech, only three months after Hizballah had violently taken control of downtown Beirut, in which he called for preventing "sedition," and underscored the obligation of the LAF to fight those who "open fire on their brothers."

LEBANON SUFFERS
SINCE ISRAEL'S CREATION

¶4. (U) This year's speech to the graduating officer class praised LAF efforts to thwart Israeli espionage and uncover terrorist cells within Palestinian camps. Sleiman stated early that Lebanon had suffered since the "creation of Israel." He called for support of UNIFIL and full implementation of UNSCR 1701 with Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory and cessation of overflights. He cautioned that diplomatic efforts were not the only "legitimate path for those whose land had been occupied and borders had been violated."

¶5. (U) Commander of the LAF, General Jean Kahwagi, in his July 30 speech commemorating Army Day, was more specific in praising the LAF, which he described as a "center of confidence of the Lebanese people." He lauded it for safeguarding the nearly incident-free parliamentary elections, fighting espionage and terrorist networks, progressing with humanitarian demining operations, assisting with local development projects, and working on a border security plan. Kahwagi made note of the LAF's "modest

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capacities" in terms of weapons.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Sleiman's speech, which his advisors had built up as a major policy statement, was overshadowed by PSP leader Walid Jumblatt's announcement that he intends to exit the March 14 Coalition (reftel). Those outlets that did cover the speech underscored Sleiman's platform of political progress, economic stimulation, and electoral reform. Sleiman's emphasis on consensus and reform is in harmony with his desire to expand the role of the President as a second consensual element of the Lebanese state, in addition to the LAF. End comment.
SISON